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NSC BRIEFING

4 April 1956

DE-STALINIZATION CONTINUES

1. In the two weeks since I last reported to the Council on the Soviet campaign to spread the "awful truth" about Stalin, the campaign has emerged from its "whispering" stage and become a matter of official record. In time-honored fashion, the first official salvo was fired in a Pravda editorial (28 March) and, since then the Navy newspaper, Soviet Fleet (30 Mar), the Soviet Army newspaper, Red Star (3 Apr), and the Communist Party's top theoretical journal, the fortnightly magazine Kommunist (April) have joined in the firing. Elsewhere in the Orbit, the Chinese Communists have refrained from independent comment, the Eastern European Satellites, while showing some individuality in their anti-Stalin treatment, are sticking to the general Soviet line and most foreign Communist Parties have now recovered from their initial confusion over the switch in line.

2. Pravda editorial credits Stalin with certain early achievements but charges that his self-florification later led to repressive one-man rule. Said Pravda, at the start, "it is irrefutable that J.V. Stalin had rendered great services to our Party, the working class, and to international labor movement." Pravda points up the important role Stalin played in the civil war and the "building of socialism," and his good fight against "deviationists", i.e., Trotsky, Kiselev, et al.. The '20s working with the Party, he also carried out a large amount of work for the industrialization of the country, collectivization of agriculture, and effecting a cultural revolution.

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a. Pravda relates that, as a result, Stalin's popularity and prestige welled. Successes "were wrongly attributed to the merits of one man, Stalin. He, lacking personal modesty, did not cut short these glorifications and praises addressed to him; moreover he supported and encouraged them in every way. As time went on, this cult of the individual assumed ever more monstrous forms and did serious harm to the cause."

b. Later Pravda states, Stalin's personal autocracy produced "violation of revolutionary law, and unjustified repressions" and brought to the fore that "imperialist agent Beria", and secret police cohorts, at the expense of the Party. Further, the Stalin cult led to "such ugly practices as the covering up of shortcomings, the varnishing of reality, and eyewash, and created "lickspittles," "Sycophants" and others "brought up on servility and subservience." Theory and other intellectual activity bogged down in "dogmatism and Talmudism."

3. Soviet Fleet, the next to fire, (30 March) scored "exaggeration of one or another hero" in Revolution and Civil War and underestimation of role of the Party and Soviet tank-and-file in war efforts.

4. Red Star, on 3 April, charged Stalin "froze development of... scientific theory... particularly... military science theory and military history." Stalin is also held responsible for "fact that in recent years serious works in military thought have not been produced here."

5. Kommunist charged that Stalin's one-man rule had "hampered normal development of life within the Party and was an obstacle whenever one wanted to intensify activity of the Party or increase its fighting ability."

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5. Kommunist continued: "The alien spirit of the cult of the individual as practiced by Stalin violated the principles of Leninism." "Stalin's ignoring of the principles of collective leadership and party life led to the violation of inter-party democracy, to the belittling of the activity of rank and file members, and their initiative, and hindered the development of criticism and self criticism."

6. Other shots include a home service broadcast by a leading Soviet historian, who stated that new histories of USSR and Soviet Party were being prepared on the basis of "strictly checked fact" to replace present Stalin-dominated versions, as well as continuing reports that Stalin's pictures and written works are disappearing.

7. In analyzing the problem of carrying the new "truth" about Stalin to the people. Pravda has stated ...it is necessary to develop

8. In Communist China, propaganda media continue to revere Mao Tse-tung. The Chinese Communists are now attributing to Mao certain theories formerly credited to Stalin, notably the concept that "the form of revolution in China would be armed struggle." Although the Pravda editorial was printed in all Peiping papers, it was printed without comment and it was 5 April before the Chinese leaders added any independent comment to the attack on Stalin. On that date, the Peiping Peoples' Daily--warning that Communist leaders must be "modest and circumspect"---declared that Stalin "became conceited" in his later years and that his "erroneous decisions on certain important questions" had brought about "serious and harmful consequences".

9. In the European Satellites, there has been uniform treatment of the basic facts of the charges against Stalin, but great differences in the vigor with which various regimes have presented their interpretations. In early March, East Germany's Ulbricht, speaking softly declared only that Stalin could not be considered a "classical interpreter of Marxism;" by mid-march, he was calling Stalin a liar and falsifier of history. The Poles started a steady barrage of criticism against Stalin in early March. On 27 March (the day before the Pravda editorial appeared) the Polish party organ, Trybuna Ludu, gave the best analysis yet made in the Satellite press of the reasons behind the anti-Stalin drive. Said Trybuna:

a. After Lenin's death, Stalin's role in the "sharp ideological struggle" against the "Trotskyites, Bukharinites, and bourgeois nationalists" and for the realization of the Five Year Plans, for the industrialization of the country, and for the collectivization of the Soviet countryside" led to the rapid rise of Stalin's prestige and popularity."

b. This encouraged him to create the "cult of the individual" in later years, "putting himself above the party leadership and the party itself, and applying repressions instead of ideological struggle against adversaries and, later on, against everyone who did not agree with his views."

c. "The cult of the individual could not but cause, and did cause, the weakening of control over various organs of authority.... The security organs became independent of party authorities and were utilized to consolidate the personal power of Stalin over the party."

d. By the time the danger of Stalin's domination had become apparent, "under conditions of fanaticism and terror against any attempt at opposition, which were the direct result of the cult of the individual, Trybuna asked, "could a struggle against the cult of Stalin be real and effective?" and answers: "the point was not to save one's own life; the point was to save the revolution. During the years 1934 to 1941, when the imperialists were preparing aggression against the Soviet Union with ever greater intensity, when any action against Stalin would have plunged the country into chaos and disorder, this could mean only one thing: to open the gates to the enemy, to open the road to imperialist aggression, to facilitate this aggression."

9. However, "in spite of the distortions and losses, the general balance sheet of the past period is victorious. Socialism triumphed in the USSR; one third of mankind took up the work of socialist construction.... We are all impressed by the vast prospects and the revolutionary strength which were shown at the 20th Congress of the CPSU.... And at the reception given for foreign delegations during the Congress, Comrade Khrushchev said that the struggle against the cult of the individual was by no means over. This struggle should last until all the remnants of the cult of the individual are eradicated from the whole of social life, from science and education, from literature and art."

10. In Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Rumania, Stalin has been specifically attacked by name. This has not happened as yet in Bulgaria and Albania, although the Pravda editorial has been reprinted.

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a. A number of Satellites have announced actions which give the appearance that repressive measures associated with Stalin are being discarded. East German premier Grotewohl publicly called for measures to "safeguard the right of citizens" and the "speedy elimination of all infringement of the rule of law." A few days earlier, Ulbricht had announced that "the central committee has decided...to appoint a commission of eight comrades to examine cases of party members who have been punished, as well as former party members."

b. In Hungary, the rehabilitation of former "arch-traitor and national deviationist" László Rajk was announced by Hungarian party first secretary Rakosi.

c. The release of three former prominent victims of purges in Poland--all associates of Gomulka--has been publicized.

11. Western European Communist parties showed some confusion, but only in Italy are there indications of serious internal dissension over the question. Togliatti, who is under sharp attack from within his party, has had to devote more time and space than any other Communist in Western Europe to his efforts to reconcile the new line with his past declarations in support of Stalin.

12. The official apologia for the assault on Stalin, while not completely candid, offers clues to its motivation. The division of Stalin's career into two phases shows attempt to lift onus of Stalinist excesses from present regime without cutting ground out from under industrial and agricultural policies initiated by Stalin but still pursued by present leaders. The stress on development of creativity at all levels reveals a real need to use "shock treatment" to cure numbing effects of era in which "infallible" leader smothered slightest

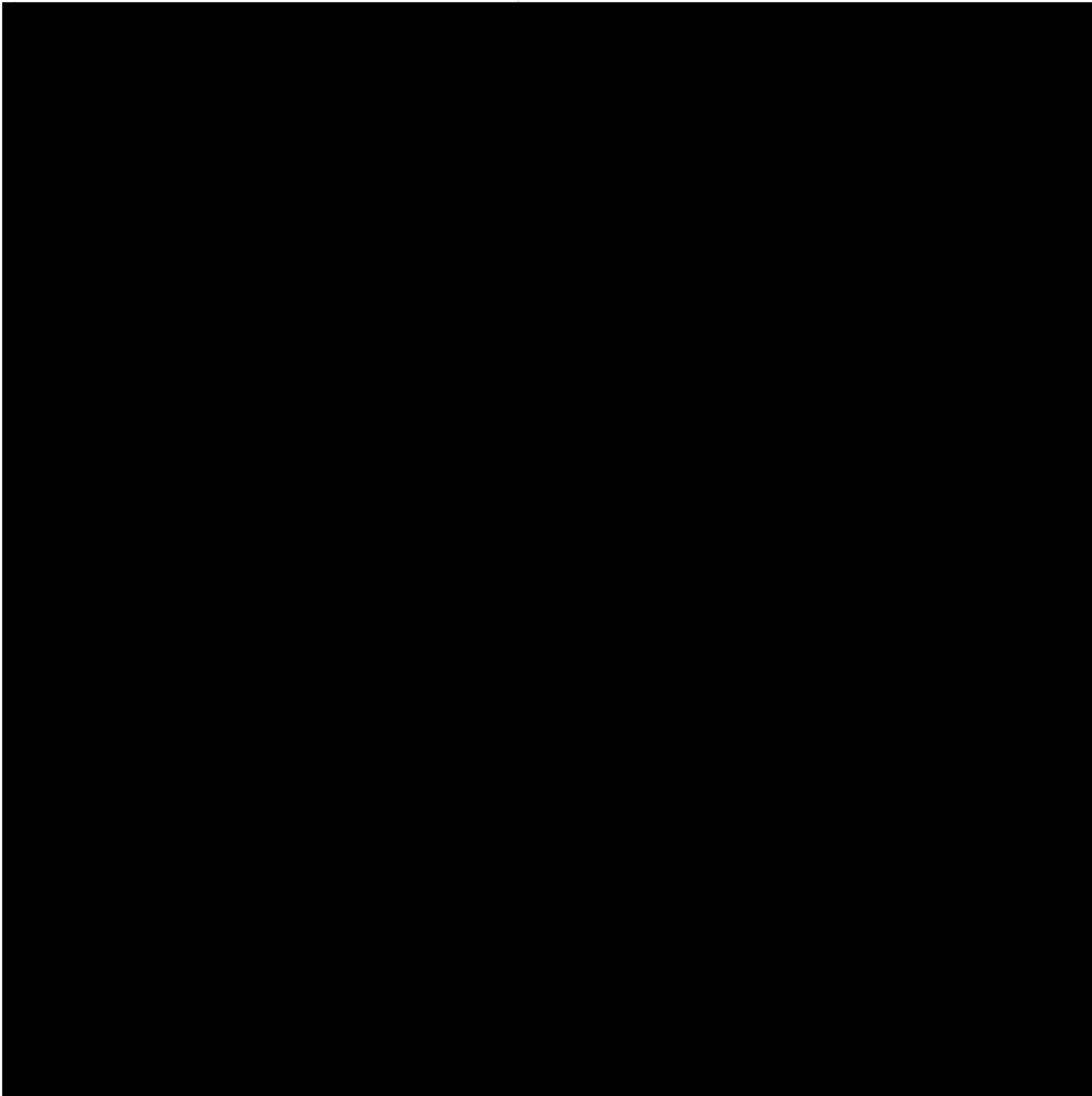
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initiative under police terror. Finally, the campaign is avowedly designed "to preclude any possibility of revival of the cult of the individual in one or another form." i.e., to prevent re-establishment of one-man dictatorship.

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5 April 1956

DE-STALINIZATION CONTINUES

- I. Campaign now out in open (Pravda, other official pubs.).
- II. Official line: early Stalin good, later years bad.
- III. Echos in Soviet Fleet, Red Star.
- IV. Kommunist says Party was hobbled:
 - A. Democracy violated, rank-and-file belittled, initiative crushed.
- V. Pravda warns against haste in spreading news.
- VI. Chinese Communists withheld comment *UNTIL 5 APRIL*
- VII. Satellite reaction shows basic conformity, but some differences in vigor.
 - A. Poles have made fullest analysis in press (beating Pravda).
 - B. Stalin attacked by name in Poland, E. Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, not in Bulgaria, Albania.
 - C. Purges being reexamined in East Germany.
 - D. Rajk "rehabilitated" in Hungary.
 - E. Three purge victims released in Poland.
- VIII. In W. Europe, only Italian party displays internal dissension.
- IX. Some motives of campaign, as we see them:
 - A. Division into early good, late evil helps present leaders.
 - B. Hope that new "freedom" will improve party wits.